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**Border crossings:
development, learning and the North-South divide**

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Abstract

While the validity of categories like 'First' – 'Third World' or 'North' – 'South' has been increasingly questioned, there have been few attempts to consider how learning between North and South might be conceived. Drawing on a range of perspectives from development and postcolonial scholarship, this paper argues for the creative possibility of learning between different contexts. This involves a conceptualisation of learning that is at once ethical and indirect: ethical because it transcends a liberal integration of subaltern knowledge, and indirect because it transcends a rationalist tendency to limit learning to direct knowledge transfer between places perceived as 'similar'. This challenge requires a consistent interrogation of the epistemic and institutional basis and implications of the North-South divide, and an insistence on developing progressive conceptions of learning.

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Introduction

Across the social sciences, it remains routinely common to find references to ‘the global South’, the ‘Third World’, and even the ‘periphery’. We are by now familiar with the arguments against such forms of categorisation, many of which have been spelled out in this journal (see, for instance, Berger, 1994, 2004; Dirlik, 2004; Kamraza, 1995; Korany, 1994). They ask, for instance, whether we can reasonably group Argentina, Botswana, and Iran in the same category of countries, when their political, cultural, and economic circumstances are so significantly different? And when patterns of poverty and wealth vary so greatly even within countries, can it make any sense to split the world into ‘First’ and ‘Third’, ‘North’ and ‘South’? Others ask that given that it is increasingly accepted that contemporary challenges of ‘development’ – such as deindustrialisation, regionalisation, flexibilization, migration, urban deprivation, economic structural change, market failure, state restructuring, concerns with social capital and social exclusion, amongst other issues (Pieterse, 2001; Maxwell, 1998) - are common to ‘poor’ *and* ‘rich’ countries, why should we choose to restrict development debates to either ‘set’ of countries? Ultimately, categorisation is an endless pursuit. As Maxwell (1998: 25) has put it: “Take any pair of societies or countries, identify some differences between them, isolate those which belong to the poorer country, and call this the true territory of development. But we could do this with Britain and Belgium, as easily as we could with Britain and Belize; and anyway, the characteristics change over time. Does the game bring us any closer to a ‘true’ definition of a developing country? I fear not”.

To be sure, these categories have their political merit. They have been used to mobilise collectives of low-income countries on issues as diverse as the non-aligned movement, labour rights, trade and tariffs, and the environment (Dirlik, 2004). Writing about Africa, Ferguson (2006: 33) has argued: “For all their manifold failings, the developmental narratives that have long dominated thinking about Africa’s place-in-the-world – narratives that explicitly rank countries from high to low, from more to less ‘developed’ – do at least acknowledge (and promise to remedy) the grievances of political-economic inequality and low global status in relation to other places”. For all that, they have also been acutely fractured categories. Witness, for instance, the divisive oil politics of OPEC. And with the ‘war on terror’ shaping the contemporary geopolitical horizon, we might detect the emergence of a conservative neo-Third Worldism that shelters state violence in

countries including Indonesia or India, and that retains little of the progressive collectivist politics of the 1950s and 1960s (Hadiz, 2004). If, as political labels, these categories are problematic, it is also the case that different forms of global solidarity are emerging. Indeed, Olesen (2004), using the example of the Zapatistas and pointing to other social movements (see, for instance, Keck and Sikkink, 1998), suggests, somewhat hopefully, that modes of global solidarity are shifting from the one-sided solidarity of Third Worldism through which there was a clear distinction between the (state) providers and beneficiaries of solidarity, to a globalised solidarity based on mutuality.

This sort of problematising is not, of course, to deny that global inequality in economic and political spheres is increasing (Ferguson, 2006; Rapley, 2001; Ould-Mey, 2003), or to deny the simple fact that as a short-hand it makes perfect sense to refer to a growing divergence between 'rich' countries and 'poor' countries. It does force us to ask, however, as a diversity of recent commentators have done, whether intellectually terms like 'South' or 'Third World' do any work? The use of these categories often seems to achieve little more than to 'fix' a country as immobile and static, to tie a country into a relation of equivalence between a set of problems and a category. The implications of doing so are being increasingly documented in a variety of fields in the social sciences.

For instance, in urban studies, Robinson (2002, 2005) argues that Euro-American constructs like the 'global city' or 'world city' theses negate the ordinary, contingent geographies of contemporary cities. In these constructs, the city is positioned in a hierarchy through which it is measured against, for instance, transnational business or finance networks, in ways that obscure other aspects of city-life in those cities, "especially dynamic economic activities, popular culture, innovations in urban governance and the creative production of diverse forms of urbanism" (Robinson, 2002: 540). We need only to bear in mind, for instance, that the economies of cities as different as Dhaka, Khartoum, Mumbai and Seoul, are largely informal (Bhowmik, 2005; Davis, 2006). These often precarious and vulnerable economies may relate to forms of transnational business or finance networks, but they remain largely distinct. Robinson builds a compelling argument for an approach that seeks to abandon categories and conceptualise cities as 'ordinary cities', "understood to be diverse, creative, modern and distinctive, with the possibility to imagine (within the not inconsiderable constraints of contestations

and uneven power relations) their own futures and distinctive forms of city-ness” (Robinson, 2002: 546).

On a different register, writing about Area Studies in the United States, Appadurai (2000) describes the insidious persistence of what he refers to as ‘trait geographies’. His argument is that much traditional thinking about ‘areas’ has been “driven by conceptions of geographical, civilisational, and cultural coherence that rely on some sort of trait list – of values, languages, material practices, ecological adaptations, marriage patterns, and the like” (Appadurai, 2000: 7; and see Spivak, 2003). In contrast to this reductive view of areas as “immobile aggregates of traits”, he argues for a focus on ‘process geographies’ that view “significant areas of human organization as precipitates of various kinds of action, interaction and motion – trade, travel, pilgrimage, warfare, proselytisation, colonisation, exile, and the like” (Appadurai, 2000: 7). This argument resonates with the recent spate of Ford Foundation sponsored University initiatives in the US, launched in 1997 under the banner of *Crossing Borders: Revitalizing Area Studies*. The Foundation has a longstanding interest in Area Studies in the US that began in the early 1950s as part of its effort to promote democracy and poverty-reduction overseas. This \$25 million initiative seeks to develop new approaches to areas provoked “in light of a dramatically changed, and increasingly interconnected, world” (Ford Foundation, 1999: xi). For example, the Institute for International Studies, University of California, Berkeley, won funding from the Foundation for its *Area Studies and the New Geographies* activities. This work explores new relations between areas, globalisation and social theory in a variety of contexts, including diasporic identities, multiculturalism, transnational environmentalism, post-communist transitions, and global-local articulations (Institute of International Studies, 2006). If in Robinson we have an argument for theorising the ‘ordinary’ in ways that transcend categories that fix, such as ‘Third World city’, in Appadurai we have an argument for change and fluidity over immobility. These two distinct examples are indicative of a gathering momentum in the social sciences to pluralise ‘the South’ and to reposition the heterogeneous geographies that lie beneath that category as active media rather than objects of study.

Nonetheless, categories like Third World or global South are active in the conceptual and institutional organisation of the social sciences today. One implication of the resilience of these categories is that they are active imaginative barriers that militate against the possibilities of different countries to learn from one

another. If Appadurai (2000), Ferguson (2006) and Robinson (2002) are concerned principally with the need to rethink areas and categories, in this paper I am concerned with how learning might occur across a North-South divide. Inevitably, this requires a degree of critical reflection on what labels like North and South do. If agents working on issues as diverse as, for instance, urban development, welfare provision, or conflict resolution, wish to draw on examples from different places, it is generally countries considered 'like-minded' or to share similar values that are invoked. This extends beyond the academy to realms such as policy-making. In the case of the UK, for instance, policy-makers appear almost instinctively to look to countries such as Canada, New Zealand and particularly the USA when attempting to draw lessons about policy. These are countries where, as the political scientist Richard Rose (1991) has argued, policy makers perceive 'common values' (for example, of a capitalist democracy, or a similar culture) to be constant: "Elected officials searching for lessons prefer to turn to those whose overall political values are consistent with their own" (Rose, 1991: 17; 1993).

This makes it unlikely for policy-makers interested in, for instance, EU expansion or federalism to think to look not just to the example of the United States but perhaps also to that of India, where the federal settlement has had to negotiate linguistic, cultural and religious differences. Attempting to learn only from the 'usual suspects', such as the US in relation to EU expansion, does not necessarily diminish the quality of policies, but it does necessarily negate a range of experience across the globe that could prove useful. This entrenches a narrow range of ideas based around particular policy networks, as Dolowitz and Marsh (1996: 353) put it: "If policy makers are looking to draw lessons from politics which are similar in institutional, economic and cultural makeup, it might be argued that, instead of expanding the number of ideas and actors involved in the decision making process, policy transfer enhances the power of a relatively small circle of actors who consistently draw lessons from each other".

So how might learning be conceived across a North-South divide? While the relations between knowledge, learning and development are of growing importance in development (see special issue of *Development in Practice*, 2002; DFID, 2000; Hovland, 2003; K. King, 2001; McFarlane, 2006a; Parnwell, 1999; Wilson, 2002; World Bank, 1999), there have few attempts to explore how learning between North and South might be conceived. Much of the literature concerned with development and learning has explored learning in the context of South-South

rather than South-North (exceptions here include Gaventa, 1999; De Haan and Maxwell, 1998; Slater, 1997). In this paper I want to argue in favour of the possibilities of learning in the field of development between development scholars and practitioners working in 'rich' *and* 'poor' countries. This requires a conception of learning that must be critically reflexive of the power relations between different groups, and that must be able to imagine the possibilities of learning between different contexts in ways that do not conform to historical patterns of colonisation or to contemporary tendencies of aid-based conditionality. I am not simply suggesting here that categories like global South are solely responsible for a lack of engagement by, for instance, Euro-American scholars working in 'Western' contexts with the literatures and knowledges of Africa, Asia and South America, or that struggling to abandon such categories will necessarily result in some kind of neutral engagement or dialogue. I do not claim that categories should be abandoned, as if that were possible, but join with a range of recent commentators who have argued in favour of new ways of conceiving 'areas' like Africa (see Ferguson, 2006) or, on a different register, the South. I am arguing for a particular conception of learning between different contexts that might help pluralise the production of knowledge and lead to a more globally informed social science – towards an image of what Spivak (2003) has called 'planetary', or what we might refer to as a more postcolonial social science.

I will argue against a conception of learning that reflects a liberal understanding of dialogue, or that invokes difference only through an imperative towards homogeneity, undermining the opportunities for learning from different places and for a more informed debate about development. This is an argument, then, for learning from different places in ways that does not seek to pre-empt what those different places might offer. Running through this discussion is a commitment to learning as a processual, provisional, and uncertain ethico-politics. This is not to underestimate the explicit and implicit hierarchies that frame conceptions and relations between different places. To invoke difference is not to naively suggest that, say, Accra, London, Mumbai and Washington suddenly occupy an horizontal equal space. People within and outside these disparate spaces often conceive of a world hierarchically ranked. As Ferguson (2006) has argued, social scientists may rightly speak of coeval 'alternative modernities' (see Gaonkar, 2001; Geschiere, 1997; Harootunian, 2001; Holston, 1999) in Africa or elsewhere, but there is a need to be attentive to how people living in, for example, sub-Saharan Africa, may conceive of Africa as inferior, as a continent at the bottom

rank of global society, and may wish to escape to a perceived 'better life' in Europe or America. Hierarchical constructs cannot be straightforwardly argued away. In addition, it would be foolish to pretend that all scholars are necessarily interested in learning from different places. That said, my suggestion is that scholars who may well be interested in this kind of engagement tend not to engage. This is in part because of a lack of critical reflection both on the epistemological and institutional biases that divide (in this case) development scholarship in the North and South, and on the possibilities that engagement might involve.

The paper will progress by contextualising division in development debates in relation to a wider imperative to separate North and South in the Euro-American social sciences. It will argue that the failure to communicate around development is part of a more general tendency to differentiate between the 'here' and 'there'. I will suggest that this is more than just habit or routine: it is bound up with an implicit tendency to view the South as a mix of countries where knowledge travels *to* rather than *from*. Indeed, the 'first here, then elsewhere' (Chakrabarty, 2000) tendency in contemporary development practice – involving the exporting of 'solutions' from the North to the South via agencies like the World Bank – still reflects a general tendency in the social sciences, despite recent critiques and alternatives. Interrogating this tendency necessarily involves engaging the apparatus of research itself. For example, Robinson (2003b) writes of a 'knowledge-production industrial complex' in geography that forms both the limits of Euro-American social science and a template for the production of parochial universalisms. Appadurai (2000) writes of the 'weak internationalism' that necessarily follows the inflexibility of the research ethic of US Area Studies. While there is evidence of significant change – particularly in relation to Appadurai's claims - these examples indicate that far from being particular to development debates, the divide between those working on the North and those working on the South is rather more widespread in the social sciences, and is both epistemological and institutional. The development of new conceptions of learning between different contexts, then, requires new imaginaries of research practice. The paper will draw on a range of concepts and methods from development and postcolonial scholarship. In making these arguments, the paper also seeks to contribute to an ongoing dialogue between development studies and postcolonial scholarship (Blunt and McEwan, 2002; McEwan, 2001; McEwan, 2003; McFarlane, 2006b; Sylvester, 1999).

Geographies of knowledge production: epistemic and institutional divides

From Rostow's (1962) influential *The Stages of Economic Growth: A Non-Communist Manifesto* - written while the Third World was the battleground of Cold War superpowers - to the world-systems theory drawn on by dependency theorists (Baran, 1957; Frank, 1967; Amin, 1976), and to the North-South divide of the Brandt Commission in 1980, mainstream and alternative accounts of development have carved-up global space into worlds and peripheries. Notwithstanding the differences and nuances within and between these varied perspectives, the close relationship throughout the post-war period between geopolitics and intellectual global categorisation divided the imagination of development studies and practice along lines of interacting but separate blocs. While terms like Third World and Global South are increasingly problematised and rethought to account for new geographies of wealth and poverty, connection and disconnection, across divides (Berger, 2004; Dirlik, 2004), one implication of this categorisation has been to mitigate the opportunities to learn about development through examples from North and South. Knowledge, of course, frequently travels *from* wealthier, more powerful countries in the development industry, but it generally travels one way and it generally travels as a 'solution' rather than as a basis for learning (Mawdsley *et al*, 2002; Ellerman, Denning, and Hanna, 2001; Ellerman, 2002). This is not just an epistemic divide: it is a material and institutional one. Let us take the example of development geography. In a short commentary in 2000, Jones, lamenting a 'ghettoization of theory', was able to write the following unsettling words about the sub-discipline and its relationship to the wider discipline:

Within Departments of Geography there are those with knowledge and expertise associated mainly with Geographies of the 'North' on the one hand, and the so-called developmentalists, or those interested in the 'South', on the other. Whilst there may be in-house links and individual exceptions, I would still maintain that each is compartmentalized, often dismissive or even apathetic to the other; or, as is often the case with development geographers, for good reasons, very defensive of 'their' marginalized terrain. This failure to communicate within our own departments, not only prevents valuable learning from either context, it also reflects the pedestrianism of academic discourse in comparison to actual processes and practices on the ground (Jones, 2000: 238).

This failure to communicate around development is part of a more general tendency to differentiate between the 'here' and 'there' in the social sciences, and

is more than just habit or routine. I would suggest that it remains bound up with an implicit tendency to view the South as a mix of countries where knowledge travels to rather than from, and it is underwritten by the organisation of knowledge production in the Euro-American academy. For instance, writing about political geography, but with an argument that is applicable more widely in the social sciences, Robinson (2003b) describes hegemonic zones of academic knowledge production that preclude more plural, internationalised forms of knowledge creation. She has argued that the material basis of this is a knowledge-production industrial complex (KPIC), through which disparate geographies of publishers, markets, citation indices, and Euro-American theoretical preoccupations, reflect and maintain the centrality and privilege of particular academic locations. This geography of knowledge production may appear obvious, but in practice there is an often implicit tension between parochial and universalist epistemic claims or assumptions that can act to mask some of the realities of the discipline's situatedness. Robinson argues (2003b: 648):

For through the KPIC, parochial knowledge is created in universal form. Western feminist scholarship becomes "feminist geography", and theories of a few western states produce "political geographies of the state". My hunch is that even the most general level of intellectual work within the discipline, i.e. dominant theorisations of space and place, are also produced in a western idiom, learning little from different traditions of scholarship and diverse political contexts.

The 'first here, then elsewhere' tendency is both epistemological and institutional, and is currently troubling a variety of (particularly) internationally-oriented disciplines (for example, see Mufti, 2005 and Spivak, 2003 on Comparative Literature). It extends too to theoretical fields of endeavour, including for instance in the recent upsurge of interest in imperialism. For example, rallying on Hardt and Negri's (2000) *Empire*, Mufti (2005: 488) is disturbed to find "the diverse regions and societies of the world" reduced to an "undifferentiated *field*" for the elaboration of universalist Euro-American logic of capitalist development. As Mufti indicates, Hardt and Negri may have had more sensitivity to the role of the particular and the subaltern in imperialism if they had engaged, for instance, with the significant reworking of Marxism and imperialism by the subaltern studies collective (Guha and Spivak, 1988; Chakrabarty, 2002).

The embedding of Euro-American centric forms of knowledge production in the institutional make-up of the contemporary social sciences betrays what Appadurai (2000) has called a 'weak internationalisation'. By weak internationalisation, Appadurai is referring to the implicit tendency to insist that the only kinds of knowledge that can be taken seriously by the Euro-American academy are those that conform with its particular formats of writing, citation, and history. This relates to the operation of established communities of judgement and accountability which insist, for example, on a privileged role for a particular community of experts who precede and follow any specific piece of research. In addition, there is in many specialisms a need for the author to "detach morality and political interest from properly scholarly research" (Appadurai, 2000: 14; Brohman, 1996; McGee, 1995; Parnwell, 1999). This raises a question that Appadurai (2000: 14) believes has not been sufficiently answered in US Area Studies: "Can we find ways to legitimately engage scholarship by public intellectuals here and overseas whose work is not primarily conditioned by professional criteria of criticism and dissemination?". This involves moving beyond the assumption that overseas scholarship only be taken seriously if it conforms to Euro-American precepts, and developing others ways of imagining the internationalisation of social science research. Interrogating the tendencies to separate the social sciences of a North from those of a South that mitigate the opportunities of learning, then, necessarily involves critically reflecting not just on how those categories are conceived, but on the very apparatus of social science research. This process must be part of asking how learning might be conceived and take place between different contexts.

Learning from development

In this section, I want to consider learning about development from two inter-related standpoints. The first part will consider the approach to learning in development studies and practice of the South, both as learning between countries and as learning from marginalised constituencies within countries. I argue that the schism between established modes of development knowledge production and more marginalised knowledges, such as those of the poor, is a product of the kind of weak internationalisation Appadurai (2000) talks about in reference to Area Studies, or that Parnwell (1999) depicts in relation to development studies. This tendency can be partly addressed through dialogue between development scholars and postcolonial scholars, particularly through the more radical conception of subaltern knowledge in postcolonial work. The argument leads to a

conception of learning distinct from the liberal tendency of much development scholarship and practice. Second, I will consider how this more radical conception of learning might be developed by outlining a notion of indirect learning.

Learning 'the South'

As I have indicated above, learning between different places is generally constrained in the social sciences by the tendency of the Euro-American academy to gloss over that which does not conform with its own regimes of academic knowledge production. In development studies and practice, despite the advent of discourses of participation and the development of research tools such as Participatory Rural Appraisal (PRA) (Chambers, 1997; Holland and Blackburn, 1998; Mohan, 2002), laudable attempts to take seriously the knowledge and experience of the poor and marginalised remain often highly problematic. As part of wider attempts to understand the views and experience of the poor, tools like PRA are to be welcomed. But despite some real successes in democratising development interventions, PRA is often rigidly tied to the agendas of donors, and can often be implemented in a tokenistic fashion, routinised and 'parcelled-in' to development initiatives (Mohan, 2002). In addition, while more successful PRA has picked-up on, for instance, gender imbalances, local elites have sometimes come to stand for 'the community' (*ibid*). To be sure, there is a great deal of social science that has engaged with marginalised knowledges in critically reflexive ways, particularly in anthropology (see, for example, Ferguson, 1999; Gupta, 1998; Hansen, 2001). However, there remains a great deal of development studies and practice that integrates subaltern knowledge into particular Euro-American positions or predilections (Briggs and Sharp, 2004).

One method for thinking through the use of subaltern knowledge is Briggs and Sharp's (2004) distinction between liberal and radical politics. They argue that there must be a radical attempt to engage different kinds of indigenous knowledge and ways of knowing, rather than a liberal attempt that integrates views into pre-given positions. In development studies in practice, however, the conception of learning from 'others' tends to be explicitly or implicitly liberal, meaning that pre-established positions or modes of thought and representation remain dominant. I will seek to build on Briggs and Sharp's (2004) notion of radical learning through brief discussion of Foucault's 'subjugated knowledges'.

The tendency towards liberal integration is strikingly clear when we consider the approach to learning embodied in the practices of powerful development agencies like the World Bank. For David Ellerman (2002: 286), former Economic Advisor to the Chief Economist at the World Bank, the Bank is a “development Church” in which “new learning at the expense of established Official Views is not encouraged”. He argues that the kinds of local knowledge that can contribute to learning about development are limited by an adherence in institutions like the World Bank to ‘Official Views’. Writing about “branded knowledge as dogma”, Ellerman (*ibid*) argues:

The Church or party model fits perfectly with the standard ‘dissemination’ or transmission-belt methodology of knowledge-based development assistance. The agency believes it holds the best ‘knowledge for development’ and is to transmit it to the recipients in the developing world through various forms of aid-baited proselytisation.

Coyle (2001), in her study of the World Bank and the IMF, has similarly found that that multilaterals have a need to project an image of having the right answers and maintaining a consensual official line. This tendency to ‘apply’ development solutions is bound up with the timescale of mainstream development projects, which puts pressure on strategies to be completed in a hurried cycle of two or three years (Mawdsley, *et al*, 2002). Ellerman warns against the “self-reinforcing lock-in between development agencies and their client countries” (2002: 289), whereby learning about problems is prevented by advice and help from a powerful outsider and an eagerness of local policy-makers to jump to a ready-made solution. This “rage to conclude” often leads to an espousal of ‘international best practices’ – “a tendency based not on any methods resembling social science but on a bureaucratic need to maintain elite prestige by ‘having an answer’ for the client” (Ellerman, 2002: 289). Much of the World Bank’s (1999) ‘knowledge for development’ initiative to date has involved the aggregation of information and knowledge, a process most starkly represented in the agency’s commitment to international best practices.

This is not to argue for a retreat into a simple localism, but rather to insist on a dialogue which has as its object the ordinariness and contingencies of a particular development issue and place. Moving towards a ‘learning organisation’ (Ellerman, 2002: 291) requires a recasting of international development agencies like the World Bank away from an adherence to set views and a “paternalistic model of

‘teaching’”, towards a ‘two-way’ learning process: “If the development agency can move beyond the Church or party model to an open learning model, then it can also move from standard knowledge dissemination or transmission-belt methodology towards knowledge-based capacity building”. Ellerman echoes Freire (1970) in casting learning as a way of creating pedagogical and social transformations, rather than an attempt to create linear knowledge additions. This is rooted in a Socratic learning tradition of intellectual duelling in which development is an ongoing mutual engagement rather than preconceived and predetermined. Such an engagement, however, must counter the unequal power relations that contour Bank-client relations, and in doing so must move beyond a liberalist conception of ‘integrating subaltern knowledge’ towards a more radical conception. The dissemination model of mainstream donors is, of course, an extreme case, but the example can be used to speak more broadly to the issue of learning from subaltern constituencies.

An important issue at stake here relates to the appropriation of subaltern knowledge. Debates in postcolonial scholarship are useful here. As Briggs and Sharp (2004: 664) have written in relation to indigenous knowledge: “A central tenet of postcolonial theory is its concern with the ontological and epistemological status of the voices of subaltern peoples in Western knowledge systems, and a postcolonial interrogation of the inclusion of indigenous knowledges in development suggests caution”. Spivak (1988), writing about the desires of European leftist intellectuals to ‘speak for’ the Third World subaltern, has famously argued that the subaltern cannot speak, so imbued must s/he be with the words, phrases and cadences of ‘western thought’ in order to be heard. This is to say that the subaltern cannot be heard as a consequence of the privileged position that, for example, academic researchers or development consultants occupy. This can lead to ‘epistemic violence’: ways of knowing the world outside of the language of ‘Western’ science, philosophy and development are invalidated or trivialised. Thus, “the subaltern must always be caught in translation, never truly expressing herself, but always already interpreted” (Briggs and Sharp, 2004: 664).

Spivak’s (1993) notions of unlearning and learning outline a formulation of ethics in this regard. ‘Unlearning’ involves “working hard to gain knowledge of others who occupy those spaces most closed to our privileged view and attempting to speak to those others in a way that they might take us seriously and be able to

answer back” (McEwan, 2003: 384). For Spivak, learning from one another is an ethical imperative. Learning in this sense is not about speaking for an individual or group, but developing new positions through interactions between researchers and people in disparate locations. This requires a "greater sensitivity to the relationship between power, authority, positionality and knowledge" (McEwan, 2003: 351). This ethic demands a consistent critical reflection in efforts that seek to learn between different contexts and constituencies. A radical conception of learning entails a commitment to a different sort of epistemic violence - a rupture of the episteme of the Euro-American academy. Foucault may have argued that this could only occur through an insurrection of subjugated knowledges (1980; 2003)ⁱ.

In his 1976 *Society Must be Defended* lecture series, Foucault reflected upon the proliferation of social critique that had emerged in the previous 15 years. These had, in part, taken aim at 'global theories' such as Marxism and psychoanalysis. He names these critiques 'local critique'. These multiple perspectives (criticizing things, institutions, practices, discourses) are characterised by Foucault as the “insurrection of subjugated knowledges” (2003: 7). By subjugated knowledges he was referring to two processes: first, the excavation of historical contents that have been buried in formal systematizations, and, second, the bringing forth of ‘nonconceptual knowledges’ - hierarchically inferior knowledges; naive knowledges, knowledges that are below the required level of erudition or scientificity (“knowledges from below”, 2003: 7). Foucault contends that what is at stake in the excavation of these knowledges is “a historical knowledge of struggles”, because in this agenda is the memory of combat: “the meticulous rediscovery of struggles and the raw memory of fights” (2003: 8). Such genealogy would not be possible, Foucault contends, were it not for “the removal of the tyranny of overall discourses, with their hierarchies and all the privileges enjoyed by theoretical vanguards” (*ibid*). A central question, then, is what happens to subjugated knowledges once they are brought into play? They are not of ‘equal’ power, so what effects do they have? For McGee (1995: 205), tackling the “vice of Eurocentricism” involves an epistemological transformation that privileges indigenous knowledge over an hegemonic ‘Western’ conception of reality. Privileging needs to be careful of romanticising local knowledge, while at the same time sensitively addressing its subjugation. I do not offer any straightforward solutions to these difficulties here - these issues are context-specific and need careful attention – but they are central methodological issues for a radical conception of learning. In order to develop this conception of learning, in the next

section I will engage with efforts to learn across a North-South divide, and will argue for a notion of indirect learning over a more restrictive notion of direct learning.

Learning between development contexts

If a more radical approach to learning must confront positionality and power, learning between contexts must address stereotypes that can limit those opportunities. Stereotypes and superficial perceptions play an important role in affecting whether knowledge travels. This is applicable, of course, beyond just the agencies of mainstream development. To take an example from my own research, in one exchange between a nongovernmental organisation (NGO) working with homelessness in the UK – Groundswell – and an NGO working with urban poverty in Mumbai, India – the Society for the Promotion of Area Resource Centres (SPARC) – it was the perception of the UK group by the Indian group that constituted one of the main reasons for limited engagement. There was a belief by SPARC leaders that they had little to learn from Groundswell because of their perception that Groundswell was dependent on state welfare and focused on receiving state financial assistance rather than developing their own solutions and funding mechanisms. In interview, one SPARC official invoked a broad distinction between First and Third Worlds. She argued that there is little potential to learn between Indian and UK groups because of the “socio-political culture” in the UK. She pointed to what she viewed as a general “lack of community”, adding that the British were too “individualistic”, and extended this view to NGOs she had encountered in Japan. She suggested that the UK and Japanese groups may find each other useful given these perceived commonalities. Such comments imply a polarising of North (here including Japan) and South, where the former stands for individualism and the latter a collectivist focus.

This perception was inaccurate, and played an important role in militating against the opportunities to learn between these two groups. Any opportunities for SPARC to learn from the exchange were limited from the start. The suggestion from SPARC was that Groundswell and the UK voluntary sector more generally was too passive because of a reliance on subsidy and therefore *too different* to be able to offer SPARC and its members any opportunities to learn. On the other hand, Groundswell reported that they learned much from SPARC on the use of local ‘horizontal exchanges’ of poor people as a learning and ‘capacity-building’ tool, on

the value of documenting the 'hidden homeless' as a basis for state negotiation, and on the relationship between Groundswell as an NGO and the community-based organisations it is linked with. For the Groundswell members, there was an important role for solidarity based around the common experiences of social injustice in forming relations between the UK homeless visitors and India's slum and pavement dwellers (see also Gaventa, 1999). A Groundswell (2001a) diary report written on an India-UK exchange in Mumbai argues that while conditions in India were radically different from those in the UK:

For the UK group, the work of the [SPARC affiliates] NSDF and Mahila Milan had been extremely inspiring, and it was surprising and exciting that they shared many common experiences. Although the problems and challenges of homelessness and poverty might be different, the process for involving homeless people in creating the solutions could be very similar indeed.

Other people working with Groundswell who met with Indian visitors at an event in January, 2000 in London commented on what they viewed as a potentially productive learning relationship:

We have to join together as the people who are actually living the problem, not the people coming in and telling us what the solution is. If we do that in this country and actually form a federation very similar to what they have in the South then we can actually federate with them around the world and have a unified voice (Newton, in Groundswell 2001b).

SPARC's conception of learning, at least in this North-South instance, is closely related to its perception of Groundswell and its Northern context. If SPARC had conceived learning with Groundswell as indirect, open and unpredictable, rather than as restricted to the closed direct transfer of knowledge or experience (a view that required for SPARC some measure of similarity in economic context), then a more productive engagement may have been possible. The conceptualisation of learning as necessarily direct dismisses possibilities because of (real or perceived) differences, and is testament to the ongoing role of divisions of North and South as imaginative barriers, even in a context where the participants had opted to participate in the exchange (see Gaventa, 1999, for examples of more productive North-South NGO collaborations, and see Edwards and Gaventa, 2001). Exploring learning possibilities among civil society groups often involves addressing these sorts of myths and stereotypes. Writing about the experiences of

people from the US in visits to India and Mexico, Gaventa (1999: 35) points to the “amazement at the knowledge, commitment and sophistication” participants found – “a reality that did not fit with their received images of ‘backward’ people.” He continues:

Moreover, they often gained inspiration from the commitment which they saw...“By getting rid of our myths, we create the desire to learn more. Understanding that we have been taught wrong and then looking at the problems and consequences of that misteaching creates enormous openings. It’s like turning a rock into a piece of clay that wants to be malleable by choice” (quoted in Covey *et al*, 1995: 11, in Gaventa, 1999: 35).

Here, I argue for a conceptualisation of learning alert to the possibility that it can occur not just in spite of differences, but *through* them. This notion of learning can present new opportunities and prompt innovative thinking, and points to the possibilities created by conceiving learning as indirect rather than direct. In order to develop the notion of indirect learning, I will consider an example from development studies.

One instructive and provocative attempt to explore the possibilities of learning about development between North and South is a special issue of an Institute of Development Studies (IDS) Bulletin of 1998 entitled *Poverty and Social Exclusion in North and South*, edited by De Haan and Maxwell. De Haan and Maxwell contend that it would be “foolish to deny the possibility of learning across geographical boundaries” (1998: 5), and make a series of interventions on different themes of development. The theme issue highlights a number of specific areas where connections can be made, including the nature of ‘active labour market policies’ designed to help people find work (P. Robinson, 1998), the nature of participation in development programmes (Gaventa, 1998), alternative routes to the reform of social welfare (Evans, 1998), and the value of food security analysis (Dowler, 1998). De Haan and Maxwell make some further suggestions: “What, for example, can we learn in the North from the successes with employment guarantee schemes in India or Botswana?” (1998: 7). They make suggestions for joint research projects on specific themes: “[S]mall-scale credit, participation and participatory methods, social policy, food policy, and public works; and, indeed, in the meaning and measurement of poverty and social exclusion” (de Haan and Maxwell, 1998: 8).

In their editorial, De Haan and Maxwell (1998: 7) argue that even if knowledge cannot travel directly, attempts to learn between North and South can still be “fruitful”. In his contribution, Maxwell (1998: 24) argues that “the point here is not to pretend that analysis and policy from one country can be read off directly from another, even within broad groupings of North and South. It is simply to demonstrate that opportunities are missed to compare and contrast”. However, elsewhere in the issue De Haan and Maxwell (1998: 7) insert a caveat: “Despite growing heterogeneity among developing countries and some signs of convergence between the North and parts of the South...the particularities of place and history remain important, so that lessons can rarely be transferred directly”. This is an important point, but perhaps a more useful way to conceptualise this is to emphasise that *because* the particularities of place and history are important, learning can occur but *usually indirectly*. This requires the understanding that knowledge and ideas can change in new circumstances, and that learning can occur in creative, indirect ways. For instance, specific development strategies in the South, like public works, food policy or participation, may appear to offer little opportunity for learning in the North if the approach is to ask whether the strategies can be transferred directly. They may offer more, however, if the approach is to engage in debate around these strategies without a rigid predetermined notion of how they may be useful. More general debates about the nature of development, such as those concerned with the meaning and measurement of terms like ‘poverty’ and ‘development’, or about the possibilities of employing a livelihoods approach to development in the North, also offer a basis through which indirect learning may occur. How, then, might this indirect learning actually take place? In what senses might we think of this kind of learning? And how might this combine with the radical conception of ethical learning outlined above? The next section explores these questions by drawing on scholarship in both development studies and postcolonialism.

Border crossings: methods and strategies

Maxwell (1998: 21-28) has suggested that we examine potential new relationships between different contexts in terms of ‘comparisons’, ‘convergences’ and ‘connections’. By comparisons, Maxwell is referring to similarities and differences in approaches to poverty and social exclusion. For example, he asks: “Are there not lessons for the developed countries in the developing country emphasis on secure and sustainable livelihoods, rather than jobs?” (1998: 23). In another

instance, he points out that “policy initiatives in the North about how to remedy food poverty seem sterile by comparison with those in the South: overly preoccupied with small-scale, local initiatives, nutrition education and the like, too little concerned with macro-economic issues, national food-pricing, and the geographical distribution of shops” (Maxwell, 1998: 24). Maxwell asserts that theorising comparisons must avoid homogenising and meta-theories, instead emphasising the multiple trajectories of those living in different spaces:

The poverty experienced by a small-scale pastoralist in semi-arid Tanzania is not of the same character, and does not have the same causes, as that experienced by a landless family in a cash-cropping area of the same country, let alone that experienced by people carrying similar labels in other countries, or by those carrying different labels altogether. Multiple realities need multiple theories – across the North – South boundary (Maxwell, 1998: 26).

In the formulation of comparison there is an at least implicit possibility of transformation in the ways in which development is read and debated. There are echoes here of Said’s (1993) notion of ‘contrapuntality’, a concept developed to analyse the ‘Western’ cultural archive with an awareness both to the dominated history narrated and the ‘other histories’ against which it acts. Contrapuntality, for Mufti (2005: 478), “begins to encode a comparativism yet to come, a global comparativism that is a determinate and concrete response to the hierarchical systems that have dominated cultural life since the colonial era”. This is not to simply suggest that hierarchies of North-South, First World-Third World, can be abandoned, as if it was in the power of academia or development practitioners to do so. Rather, in the rethinking of what those notions stand for, indirect learning can occur by drawing comparisons across disparate, and seemingly unlikely, places.

By convergences, Maxwell (1998) is referring to how different areas across the globe are converging in various ways, for instance, in share of manufactures of GDP, general shifts towards income tax, or growing and differentiating literacy rates. By connections, he is referring to the myriad economic, social, political and cultural connections often associated with globalisation, including the linking of NGOs and the common causes of poverty. He sees opportunities to develop theories and perspectives that mirror transnational trends in that they move beyond divides of North and South (Maxwell, 1998: 26). The Ford Foundation’s

Crossing Borders initiatives mentioned earlier focuses on this theme of connection. The University of Berkeley's *Area Studies and the New Geographies* activities are one set of examples here. Many of these initiatives, straddling a broadly defined international studies and geopolitics literature, seek to re-theorise established notions of 'area', 'region' and 'border'. They have focused on the emergence of a plethora of political, economic and cultural connections and disconnections in different parts of the globe, and used them to illuminate understanding not just of regions like Africa or East Asia, but to look anew at notions like globalisation and modernity, as well as to interrogate the utility of different theoretical perspectives as they operate in different spaces. Much of this work has sought to theorise the relationship between area and globalisation, interrogating those terms in the process. Theoretically, the central reference point has remained 'Western' theorists, including Bourdieu, Castells, Foucault, Geertz, Giddens, and Habermas (Institute of International Studies, 2006). The emphasis here has been on theorising the changing geographies of localities and regions produced by new forms of connection, rather than on questions of learning.

Maxwell's (1998) useful schema of comparisons, convergences, and connections offers a set of ways to conceptually connect different parts of the globe in a progressive way. It is progressive because while it focuses attention on the possibilities of learning between different contexts, it does not do so at the expense of the particularities of place and circumstance. Writing in a similar vein, Robinson (2002: 532) promotes "a more cosmopolitan approach" to urban studies". This is an approach that seeks to bring more cities into view in urban studies, and that does so through a postcolonial critique of generalised, abstract Euro-American analytic categories. For Robinson, this is not simply about invoking deviation from a dominant Euro-American theme. Two strategies in particular are required. First, a need to decolonise Euro-American perspectives by consistently asking, "How are theoretical approaches changed by considering different cities and different contexts?" (Robinson, 2002: 549). Ferguson (2006) has pointed out that in the enormous scholarly and public literatures on globalisation, positive and negative, remarkably little has been said about Africa. As he shows, an engagement with scholarship on the political economy of Africa reveals key features of how the 'global' works and how it might work in the future. What he sees, for example through often heavily guarded transnational enclaves of mineral extraction, is a global of "sharp, jagged edges; rich and dangerous traffic amid zones of generalized abjection; razor-wired enclaves next to abandoned

hinterlands” (Ferguson, 2006: 48). He does not suggest that this view from Africa reveals the ‘true nature’ of globalization, but that it highlights “another perspective on the ‘global’” and insists “that there is no view of ‘globalization’ that ‘covers it all’” (*ibid.* 49). This is not an attempt to ‘add Africa and stir’, as if arriving at an all-inclusive picture, but to demonstrate that “the view from Africa challenges us to develop new, more situated understandings of emerging global patterns” (*ibid.*).

Second, there is a need to engage, on as close a level playing field as possible, with the work of thinkers in different places: “If a cosmopolitan urban theory is to emerge, scholars in privileged western environments will need to find responsible and ethical ways to engage with, learn from and promote the ideas of intellectuals in less privileged places” (Robinson, 2002: 549-550). This requires a critical epistemic interrogation and reworking, such as that found in Appadurai’s formulation of ‘strong internationalisation’:

[‘Strong internationalization’] is to imagine and invite a conversation about research in which...the very elements of this ethic could be the subjects of debate. Scholars from other societies and traditions of inquiry could bring to this debate their own ideas about what counts as new knowledge and what communities of judgement and accountability they might judge to be central in the pursuit of such knowledge (Appadurai, 2000: 14).

The notion of strong internationalization is one that embodies a progressive outlook to the possibilities of learning between different spaces and constituencies, and requires an openness to distinct forms of knowledge production that do not necessarily comply with, for instance, Euro-American traditions of academic knowledge production. This would involve a particular and reflexive engagement with, for example, indigenous conceptions of environment and conservation, activist-intellectual forms of knowledge about the lives of people living in slums, or regimes of academic knowledge production formulated through distinct patterns of collection, citation or judgement. There is a challenge here for academics to connect more closely and more frequently with the worlds and vocabularies of disparate scholars and activists: “One of the biggest disadvantages faced by activists working for the poor in fora such as the World Bank, the UN system, the WTO, NAFTA, and GATT is their alienation from the vocabulary used by the university-policy nexus (and, in a different way, by corporate ideologues and strategists) to describe global problems, projects and policies. A strong effort to

compare, describe and theorize 'globalization-from-below' could help to close this gap" (Appadurai, 2000: 17).

This involves interrogation of terms like development, globalisation, politics and modernity, and an examination of what their heterogeneity might mean. Inevitably, this must be a geographical discussion. For example, social scientists may write of politics as a shared homogenous and abstract zone, wherein the vote, for instance, is a central "anonymous performance of citizenship" (Chatterjee, 2004: 18). But, as Chatterjee (2004: 11) has written in reference to early Independent India, political actions, programs and authority are often transmitted in the language of myth or popular religion. In this context, the vote may be less an act of support for a candidate with aspirations for parliamentary presence, and more an act of faithful affirmation towards particular individuals, such as Mahatma Gandhi (who was often constructed through stories of miraculous powers, see Amin, 1984). Similarly, the examination of 'alternative modernities' is generally different in Asia and in Africa. If the discussion in East Asia, for example, centers on attempts to ensure that 'economic convergence' with the 'West' takes place with 'Asian values', then the discussion in many parts of Africa begins by emphasising the modernity of traditions, as in Geschiere's (1997) 'modernity of witchcraft', for instance (see Ferguson, 2006: 184-185). Ferguson (2006: 184) argues that among scholars of Africa, talk of economic convergence has been largely abandoned as implausible. There is a need to go beyond, as these scholars and others have done, simply emphasizing the heterogeneity of conceptions and practices of politics, modernity, or globalisation, towards an effort to develop more situated understandings.

These two imperatives, to provincialise and to create new forms of dialogue, offer the possibility – as Robinson (2003a: 275) has written – of an "engaging and critical transnational, but also post-universal, scholarship suitable for the diverse, or 'discrepant', cosmopolitanisms (Clifford, 1997) of most societies". If such an approach invites the possibility of a reimagining of international scholarly practices, one task for development studies is to build-on schema's like Maxwell's (1998) by developing concepts and methods that invoke learning from different places in progressive ways.

For instance, to Maxwell's (1998) schema we might add the notion of *translation* in order to highlight the necessity and creative possibility of adaptation in learning.

While Maxwell's notion of comparisons points to this, the notion of translation is more explicit and places greater emphasis on the potential value of indirect learning, thus drawing emphasis away from a focus on simply whether knowledge or an idea can be transferred directly or not. Translation comes originally from the work of Michel Serres (1974) and "involves creating convergences and homologies by relating things that were previously different" (Gherardi and Nicolini, 2000: 333). Latour (1999: 179) uses translation to refer not to "a shift from one vocabulary to another, from one French word to one English word, for instance", but "to mean displacement, drift, invention, mediation, the creation of a link that did not exist before and that to some degree modifies the original two". A "chain of translation" refers to the many steps through which knowledge is produced (Latour, 1999: 311). The process of translation changes to varying extents not just the forms of knowledge but the people and places that come into relation with knowledge. Rather than focussing simply on the question of whether knowledge remains the same or not, it focuses attention on the multiple forms and effects of knowledge.

Translation challenges the diffusion model (of epidemiological origin) that traces movement as innovationⁱⁱ (Brown, 2002; Hagerstrand, 1968; Latour, 1986). While the diffusion model focuses on travel as the product of the action of an authoritative centre transmitting knowledge, translation focuses on travel as the product of what different actors do with objects (statements, orders, artefacts, products, goods, etc.) (Gherardi and Nicolini, 2000: 335). This draws attention to the creative interaction between the 'here' and 'there', and the particular and the general. Translation is open to the possibility of varying degrees of stability and flux: it is not the case that every encounter must always involve complete change, nor is it the case that every encounter must always involve the recreation of a periphery in the image of a centre. Translation, then, embodies a sense of creative possibility that does not reduce learning to direct transfer (I have developed this argument elsewhere by examining the role of translation in 'post-rationalist' approaches to learning, McFarlane, 2006a). In this context, we might usefully invoke Said's (1984) development of 'travelling theory'ⁱⁱⁱ. Said argued against the tendency to seek to apply theories wholesale or to dismiss them as completely irrelevant. He argued that the use of theory need not be reduced to this binary construction, and he regretted that much intellectual work is caught up in what he viewed at the time as an anxiety and / or criticism over the question of misinterpretation:

It implies, first of all, that the only possible alternative to slavish copying is creative misreading and that no intermediate possibility exists. Second, when it is elevated to a general principle...[it] is fundamentally an abrogation of the critic's responsibility...Quite the contrary, it seems to me possible to judge misreadings (as they occur) as part of a historical transfer of ideas and theories from one setting to another (Said, 1984: 237).

This notion of 'misreading' focuses attention on the importance of change and the positive role of using what is witnessed, experienced or read about in one place in a way that need not be about trying to copy and directly apply it in another. The concept addresses a politics of replication by emphasising the importance of creativity and local relevance. An emphasis on indirect learning rallies against the dismissal of, for instance, a place, knowledge or an idea as wholly irrelevant, and draws attention to the creative and uncertain possibilities of misreadings. Concepts like translation or perspectives like travelling theory open possibilities for indirect learning and assert transformation over transfer.

This argument for a new conception of learning about development between different contexts does not extend to arguing for a wholesale organisational change, so that the remit of, say, scholars working in development studies, goes from local to global. Instead, the conceptual changes that I am arguing for involve a willingness to engage in examples of development transnationally in order to move towards a richer, more postcolonial development. This might involve, for example, development scholars focussed on Euro-American cities engaging with literature and colleagues working on and in different urban contexts, and in ways that go beyond simply 'adding-on' a case study towards developing understandings that are both more informed and more situated. In reference to development studies, Maxwell (1998: 28) suggests ways of negotiating this challenge:

There is one route I think we should not take, which is that each of us should try to merge all our work into one, covering North and South...Instead, people who specialise on the North or South will continue to do so, but should make new efforts to learn from each other, to explore common problems brought on by convergence, and perhaps to develop new theory together. The best place to start might be with specific topics, like public works, food policy or participation – indeed, with the meaning and measurement of terms like 'poverty' and 'social exclusion'. This will enable collaboration to be built inductively, from the bottom-up.

For Slater (1997; and see 2004), an openness to different conceptions, practices and modes of knowledge production requires an ethic of respect and critical reflection, offering one set of possibilities for beginning to negotiate the unequal power relations of such engagements. This approach echoes Spivak's (1998) ethical conception of learning, and the radical conception discussed earlier:

In a world increasingly configured by global connectivity, a strong case can be made for posing the significance of another three Rs - respect, recognition and reciprocity. If our geopolitical imagination in the field of knowledge is going to be open, nomadic, combinatory, critical and inquiring, it can displace the hold of Euro-Americanist thought and find ways of learning from the theoretical reflexivity of different writers and academics from other worlds and cultures...Mutual respect and recognition must include, if they are to be of any meaningful ethical value, the right to be critical and different on both sides of any cultural or intellectual border. Reciprocity and dialogue can only emerge if there is a will to go beyond indifference and historically sedimented pre-judgements; to engage in analytical conversations with others in ways that can make the outside part of the inside and vice-versa has the potential to engender mutually beneficial encounters (Slater, 1997: 648).

This image of a respectful form of strong internationalization also entails working for new collectives of 'elite' and 'subaltern', which are reflexive of who starts and controls them as well as who the members are. It is an image that opens another set of challenges at the center of the power-relations of academic knowledge production: learning how to learn from below (see Brohman, 1996; Edwards, 1989). For Spivak (2003: 52), this involves far more than just 'learning about other cultures', "this is imagining yourself, really letting yourself be imagined (experience that impossibility) without guarantees, by and in another culture". Such an effort would in part echo Spivak's (1993) ethical formulation of unlearning and learning, where learning in new collectives is an ethical imperative that outlines a horizon of transformation: towards a postcolonial project as an 'ethic-politics' of becoming, emphasising the processual and anticipatory – in McEwan's (2003: 349) words, "recognising a condition that does not yet exist, but working nevertheless to bring that about". Developing these sorts of collectives in research around, for instance, development, can contribute to new ways of imagining the research enterprise, as well as places and regions. This involves asking not just how 'others' see development, but how they see the world (in regional terms and in other ways) - in short, "how does the world look...from other locations (social, cultural, national)?" (Appadurai, 2000: 8; see Ferguson, 2006). Often, the view from different locations is at odds with more established positions, whether this is in terms of the questions

that seem most relevant, the issues that matter most, the objectives of scholarship or knowledge, or other criteria. North-South learning is not a straightforward process; it must negotiate these differences with sensitivity to the world-views of those 'on the ground'. Engaging these 'global shadows' (Ferguson, 2006) marks the lineaments of a postcolonial development that transcends North and South: the formation of new collectives across space, of researchers and activists, with the aim of understanding and theorising different and changing forms of development.

Conclusion

If we are approaching an interdisciplinary moment in the social sciences and humanities (Bal, 2002; Thrift, 2002), this has not translated into a strongly international moment. For all the talk of globalisation or subaltern knowledge, and despite influential interventions in development (Chambers, 2002) and postcolonial (Spivak, 1988) studies, there has been little attempt to consider how learning between North and South contexts and constituencies might be conceived. In Spivak's (2003: 72) *Death of a Discipline*, she argues that Comparative Literature, through a dialogue with Area Studies, should urgently attempt to re-imagine itself as "planetary rather than continental, global, or worldly". For Spivak, discourses of globalisation too often present the world as graspable, as a space that can be mapped, controlled, and centralised. In proposing 'planet', she proposes a figure impossible to derive or hold, entailing a particular conception of ourselves as planetary subjects rather than global agents. 'Planterity' is mobilised as a way of thinking beyond a cartographic reading of space, an open concept that insists on an attempt to think before and beyond the striated spaces of areas, regions, and continents. It is, then, the impossible possible, an undecideable alterity in that it cannot be predicted, only prefigured, imagined: "When I invoke the planet, I think of the effort required to figure the (im)possibility of this underived intuition" (Spivak, 2003: 72). It is not the academic's task, argues Spivak, to develop these planetarities. The possibility of planetarity lies in the academic *working with* subaltern constituencies and literatures, making the key methodological challenge *learning how to learn*. This methodology can lead to new and different theorisations of disparate phenomena, not all of which, of course, will be necessarily progressive. Spivak calls for new collectives crossing old academic borders, collectives that can imagine alterity to History and Space, and which are interrogative of their own limitations (she insists, for instance, that we consistently ask ourselves, 'how many are we?'). Planetarity, then, involves an attempt to

move beyond the boundaries of familiar cartographic spacings, such as North or South.

Spivak is centrally concerned in this book with Comparative Literature and Area Studies, but in closing I would seek to retain her enthusiasm for dialogue between the humanities and social sciences around the problematic of 'global learning'. In particular, I would emphasise the importance of the growing dialogue between postcolonial and development scholarship as a basis for developing new ways of conducting research on development. In developing new concepts and methods for internationalising the interdisciplinary formation of development in different contexts, opportunities for learning between and from different places in progressive ways can emerge. However, it is crucial that there is critical reflection on how learning is conceived.

I have argued for a conception of learning that is critically reflexive of unequal positions and power relations and that seeks new modes of learning outside of dominant institutionalised practices of knowledge production. This is a conception of learning that focuses not just on the direct transfer of knowledge, but on the creative possibility of indirect learning. It is a view of learning that is at once ethical and indirect. It is ethical because it transcends a liberal integration of subaltern knowledge, and supports new forms of epistemic violence through which subjugated knowledges might reposition development debates and practices. It is indirect because it transcends a rationalist tendency to limit learning to direct knowledge transfer between places perceived as 'similar'. This conception and politics of learning, then, would hope to generate new forms of dialogue and border crossings in contemporary development debates. I have highlighted a number of tools aimed at this purpose, from Maxwell's schema of comparison-connection-convergence, to concepts like translation and perspectives like travelling theory or strong internationalisation. These concepts and methods act against the imperative to categorise in ways that limit opportunities to learn from different contexts, whether they are imaginaries of First-Third World or North-South. Rather, they contribute to the broader project of a more postcolonial development and social science, and offer the opportunity of an undecided and yet-to-be-written planetary development studies.

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ⁱ I am grateful to Jon Shapiro Anjaria for prompting this.

ⁱⁱ See, for example, Hagerstrand's (1968) influential formal and instrumental model of innovation diffusion.

ⁱⁱⁱ Said gives two examples of ‘travelling theory’: one the travelling of a theory from revolutionary Budapest to Paris and the other of Foucault’s theory of power, and argues for the importance of thinking cautiously over whether theories from elsewhere are relevant and how they can be changed for a new setting.